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Lust, Gluttony, Greed: A Collaborative Piece about Four Women in Hell

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Bard

Lust, Gluttony, Greed:
A Collaborative Piece about Four Women in Hell

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Theater and Performance Studies
of Bard College

by
Leah Rabinowitz

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

May 2016

Presented as a part of the INFERNO Festival

Created in collaboration by

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Jack Ferver, Advisor

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To Jack Ferver for being the best advisor, teacher, mentor and continually inspiring me

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To the Carmelite Sisters Convent in Germantown

And to everyone else that made this show happen

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Introduction

Last year, when I found out about the new requirements for this year's senior projects in Theater and Performance I was in Berlin. This new requirement came as a bit of a surprise for me. I am a double major, also majoring in Literature, and was expecting to do a joint project combining both divisions; my original plan was to adapt a work of literature into a play. I did not find out about the new requirements for our project until a couple of days after the seniors were told in person as the department had forgotten that I was abroad. I discovered these new additions from an email I received titled, "Lust, Gluttony, and Greed." Within the email was a note from the members of my group explaining to me that I was now required to do a collaborative piece and that the seniors collectively decided that they were going to create pieces inspired by *Dante's Inferno*. Each individual group had been assigned to one of the nine circles in hell. My group members were Abby, Salome, and Eleanor and we were to devise a performance based off of lust, gluttony and greed. I had no say about whom I wanted in my group or what circle I wanted to be a part of. At first I was a bit disappointed that I could not go with my original plan in creating a joint project and angry that the seniors did not include me in their decision process. Fortunately, I liked the people who I was selected to work with and the sins that were given to me as well. I figured that working in a group might make

the creation process easier. At the time, I could not foresee the complications that it would entail.

Chapter 2: The Beginning - Defining Lust, Gluttony, and Greed

The beginning of our process started when I was abroad, which meant that I could not physically be with the rest of my group. The week after I had received the news about this project, Eleanor, Salome, Abby and I had our first official meeting over Skype with our advisor Jack Ferver. During this Skype call we all expressed our excitement to work together in creating this piece. I was relieved to know that my group had specifically selected me to work with them, rather than being forced to have me in their group since I was abroad. As all of us had no clue how to start this process while I was away, Jack suggested what we should first think about what the words lust, gluttony, and greed meant to us. He said that we could not start creating our piece until we each had formed our own definitions of these sins. Creating our own definitions meant that we could narrow in the meaning behind our piece before the execution of it. After this meeting we decided that we would spend the rest of the summer forming these definitions for ourselves so that we could start our rehearsal process as soon as we returned to school in the fall.

In order to figure out how I wanted to personally extract each of these sins I explored secondary interpretations from the most basic source. My process began by looking up the *Oxford English Dictionary* definitions for lust, gluttony, and greed. By doing this I was able to create my own association with these words by discovering the

ways in which they were universally defined, when extracted from its association with sin.

The *OED* definition for lust is “a very strong sexual desire.” While this may be the literal interpretation of the word, I do not think that “a very strong sexual desire” is a sin, as I believe it is a natural human inclination. The discovery of this definition allowed me to redefine the word in terms of my own idea of sin. I defined lust as an act of wanting something that you cannot physically have or need. The first action that comes to mind when I think of lust as a sin is infidelity, especially within a relationship, however I also view other forms of cheating as an impulse that can derive from lust. At the same time, I do not believe that lust must always be defined within the context of sex. I think there are many facets of life in which one can have lust for. While the word is commonly associated with sex, I interest in exploring how we could portray lust in other ways.

Defining gluttony was a bit difficult for me as it is a term that I do not hear or use often. When I think of gluttony I simply think of food. The *OED* definition for gluttony is “habitual greed or excess in eating.” Like lust, I think there are other ways in which gluttony can be distinguished from its literal definition. The word does not necessarily need to be defined in terms of food or eating. The word that stood out to me the most within this definition was “excess;” I associate gluttony with consumerism and the natural human desire to want more than is necessary.

While looking up the definitions for each of these sins, I realized that they are all fairly similar. The *OED* definition for greed is an “intense and selfish desire for something, especially wealth, power, or food.” The word greed is in the *OED* definition for gluttony and my own definition of lust is similar to my definition of gluttony — a desire for something that one does not need. In the end I noticed that each of these sins stem from internal desires — mainly the desire to consume what is unnecessary. When defined all together these sins convey ideas of eating, selfishness, and excess — all themes that I wanted to include within our piece.

Chapter 2: Rehearsal and Inspiration

Once we had our definitions solidified the rehearsal process was able to start. However, our definitions were quite different from one another, which meant that we all wanted to explore the piece in opposing ways. During our first few meetings we decided to let one member of the group lead the rehearsal so that we had an equal opportunity to see how our varying ideas could fit within the piece. Most of these rehearsals consisted of movement based exercises inspired by our definitions. I had a hard time with these exercises since they were not in tune with how I usually work. When I construct a piece of theater I need to form an idea and structure before I can get on my feet. My group members, however, believed that these exercises would inspire the narrative instead of the other way around, but after two months of trying to devise a piece solely based off of movement we were back to square one.

We collectively started to notice that during our rehearsals we would get too caught up in our own ideas and visions for the show that we forgot we were basing the piece off of an actual literary work. Within the initial discussion of the project, the whole senior class agreed to use a modern translation of *Dante's Inferno* by Mary Jo Bang, as the supporting text for our pieces. As a group we decided to go back to the text and see if we could find inspiration within Mary Jo Bang's words.

After each of us had read the text as a group we decided to experiment in our process by combining the literal text with movement. This idea was inspired by the Elevator Repairs Service' performance of "Gatz," a seven hour play in which the entirety of the *The Great Gatsby* is read while performers are simultaneously acting it out. Of course we were not going to read the whole text in our final performance, but we wanted

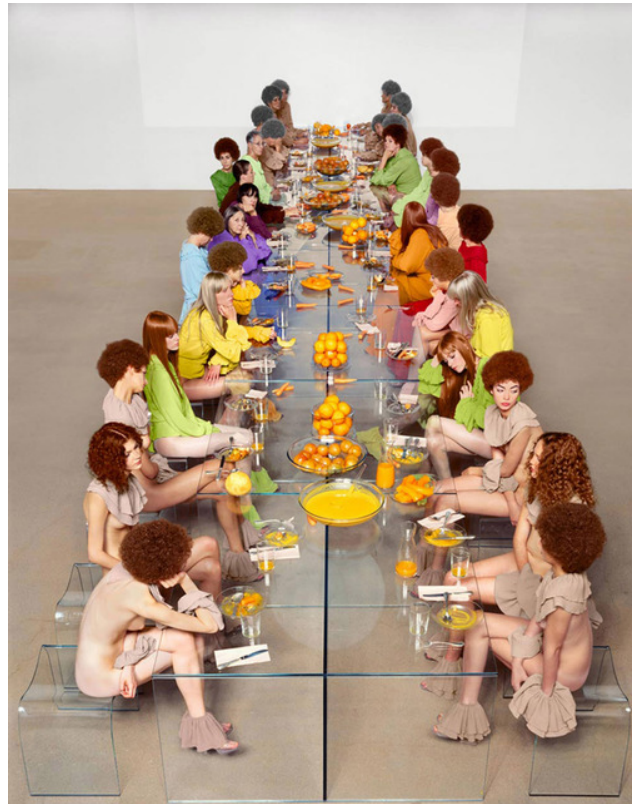
to see if we could make something out of it by creating work directly from the source. We played around with this idea by performing the text in three different ways. First we would simply read the text out loud by sporadically switching narrators. Then we performed the text while one person read and rest of us choreographed movement to the words. In our third interpretation we all created movement based on the text without vocalizing it. After the first few times performing the text with these methods, I realized that the text was quite boring and so was our performance. I did not feel connected to the text in any way or to our movement. I vocalized this on several occasions, but the rest of the group seemed to like the idea so I decided to trust them instead of stand my ground. However, when we performed this for our advisor he had the same feelings as I did. He told us that this specific combination of words and movement was uninteresting to watch because he could tell that we all were disconnected from it. While I am glad this idea was not used, exploring it gave us a better sense of what we did not want to do within our piece. This moment served as a huge turning point for us in our rehearsal process.

This failed performance forced me to think about concepts that we could all agree upon to display within our piece — I quickly realized that the one thing that connected each of us was that we were all women. We were the only group in the show that had a cast of all female bodies and were the only group that did not cast extra members. More than that, we were all women that were writing, devising, and creating our project while simultaneously being in it. Why not use what would make us stand out? Luckily my group and advisor agreed with me.

In order to find a specific setting for our piece, we started to think of communities that were unique to females. Originally we drew ideas from multiple

sources of art and pop culture that displayed women in a particular way. We looked at TV shows such as Charlie's Angels, The Bachelor, and the Real Housewives. We felt that these shows represented our sins, as they are all blatantly misogynistic. We also looked at art made by female artists to draw visual inspiration from. One of the artists that I was most inspired by was performance artist Vanessa Beecroft. Many of her pieces are about women's issues; primarily eating disorders. Her pieces were of interest to me because they deal with ideas that I was interested in exploring such as eating, selfishness, and desire. Beecroft stages her work with girls who have little meat on their bones to comment on the female's desire to be thin and their lack of desire for food. She places these women in a way that depicts them as beautiful, while simultaneously displaying the guilt and consequences of their actions for her viewers. Her carefully assembled performance pieces look like a painting from far away, but once you see them up close the problems that she poses within her work became widely apparent. The images she creates are pleasing to the eye, even though many of her women are highly malnourished. The issues she points to in her pieces makes one almost feel guilty for enjoying it. Beecroft toys with the viewer in her work by showing the discrepancies in women's standards of beauty and health. She creates feminist performance art that is ironic and extremely confrontational.

A picture of Beecroft's work titled: *vb52.05.nt*, 2000



While I was not entirely interested in discussing body issues I was interested in creating images for the audience that might make them uncomfortable. I wanted to confront the audience with issues that applied specifically to females.

While thinking about secular communities and women's issues I landed on the idea of nuns in a convent. I believed that a convent would be the perfect setting for our piece since it would be an easy space to house the exploration of our three sins. When I was in high school my friend gave me a calendar titled "Nuns Having Fun," which was filled with images of nuns doing activities that one would not expect nuns to do. These images reminded me of my own collective definitions of lust, gluttony, and greed — the desire to have or want what one does not need. Convents create a space for women that are free of unnecessary excess. In these images these nuns do not need to be performing

these activities, nor should they be. It seems as if they are performing these actions out of a want and desire to get away from the convent.

Here are examples of some images from the calendar:



After receiving this calendar I became completely fascinated by the idea of nuns and have bought an issue of it every year.¹ What I enjoyed most about these pictures was that all of the women in them look happy. The stereotypical image of nuns is women with blank faces in a convent praying to God. I never understood why one would choose to become a nun. I am not religious and have no desire to devote my time to God, but I have always looked at nuns as women who were escaping life. By being trapped in these convents with rules and restrictions I never really grasped on how they could truly be fulfilled in life, which is something I wanted to comment on. After reading various articles on why women join convents I found that most of them are actually fairly happy with their decision, as they are highly devoted to their faith. I wanted to make sure that our piece would not diminish the idea of joining a convent or make fun of the women who do; but rather display the limitations that convents can have on women. I discovered that a universal concept within all convents is routine. Nuns create routines to avoid idleness, gossip, and vanity all of which I thought would be interesting to discuss within our piece.

As I continued my research I accidentally stumbled upon a Lifetime reality show titled “Becoming Nun.” This show is a modern day depiction of why young women become nuns. All of the women on the show are in their early twenties and have different reasons for wanting to join the convent. The show follows these women in their first couple of weeks as novice nuns. They are guided by elderly sisters who teach them what it means to “become a nun.” This show was fascinating to me because each of these women came from fairly normal lives. While some of the women had always wanted to be a nun, many of the other girls decided later on in life. One of the girls even left her

¹ Due to my famous obsession with nuns my high-school senior superlative was “to be the indiest nun ever,” which I feel I succeeded in becoming by creating this piece.

fiancé to join the convent. Consequently, these women seemed to not realize what becoming a nun truly meant, which made the show even more compelling to watch. There is a scene in the show where all of the novice nuns secretly gather when the elderly sisters go to sleep. They convene in a small closet and drink wine. Their struggle with sticking to the rules is what made the show most interesting to watch, as reality TV is always driven by conflict. The show followed the same structure as many other reality television series. There were frequent close ups on each of the girls in between scenes where they would gossip about the other novices. I was compelled by the irony of the show and wanted to display this somehow in our piece. Funny enough the show took place at a convent in Germantown. We had planned to go speak to the nuns in person, but personal matters in our group got in the way. After doing extensive research on nuns and convent life I thought our project now had a good basis and that we were in a mutual agreement for how we wanted to structure our piece.

Chapter 3: The Email

While I was keen on the nun idea some other members of the group were not. However, this was never expressed to the group as a whole during rehearsals, which caused a setback in our process. During these next couple of months our rehearsal process seemed as if it was going quite smoothly. We honed in on our collective ideas and started to write a script based off the research we did on nuns and convent life. At this point I was extremely happy with where the project was heading, but much to my surprise some of the members felt that this idea was limiting. Unfortunately, instead of expressing their sentiments to the group, an email was sent to our advisor in spite of me and another group member; the email was accidentally forwarded to the entire group.

Dear Jack,

[REDACTED] and I are experiencing some anxiety with how the project and its content are progressing. The group seems to be divided up into two separate camps with us on one side, and [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] on the other. [REDACTED] and I got together and talked tonight and articulated the concerns and ideas that we have for the piece. We do not feel comfortable sharing this with [REDACTED] though we realize that it is necessary to communicate for the piece to move forward.

Is there any way that [REDACTED] and I can meet with you this Sunday to discuss our ideas and figure out how we can present them to the rest of the group?

We would appreciate if you did not discuss this meeting with [REDACTED] as we don't want to create further tension before we even have a plan.

Thank you so much,

[REDACTED]

I was surprised to receive this email, as it seemed to be a bit out of character for the other members of my group. I knew my partners fairly well from working with them in the past and I would never have expected them to send an email like this. While I was set to shape our piece around the concept of “nuns” I would not have been offended if others disagreed. I was disappointed that members of my group felt as if they could not express

their concerns and ideas to me directly. I trusted them and valued their thoughts as much as my own. I was confident that they were all great artists and creators. I was under the impression that we were working well as a group since no one had expressed any concerns about the piece so far. I could not feel the “tension” that they mentioned within the email. While this email came from out of nowhere, I believed that revealing it to us actually benefited the creation of our show. This email debacle forced us to discuss the problems in our piece directly rather than going through our advisor who luckily wanted to remain uninvolved. As soon as this email was sent to me I suggested that we discuss it right away. Members of the group apologized and expressed that they were having a difficult time grasping on the nun idea. There were certain themes and issues they wanted to bring up within our piece and thought that placing them in the world of a convent would be distracting. They wanted to express concepts of consumerism, guilt, and the idea of creating cults. I assured them that we could write the script in a way that would also express these notions. We already had a draft of our show and at this point it was a too late in the process for us to change our ideas around completely. After several meetings with Jack and group discussions we were able to work things out and rewrite a new script.

Some of the members, however, did not feel comfortable with writing a script and believed that we should just devise the whole piece without a structured text. However, our advisor thought that at this point in the process it would be better if we wrote a play, as did I. In the end I suggested that some of us could write the script while the others revised it. This is how we created our final product. Salome and I wrote the first draft of our script while Eleanor and Abby edited it. The first draft served as the structure for our

piece. We created specific characters and their roles within the convent. Then we configured the plot of the show and the themes we wanted to express in our dialogue. Our first draft was extremely loose, but thankfully Eleanor and Abby were able to finalize our ideas and make the piece into a full play. There are aspects of the show that only came at the end of our rehearsal process, but the email debate forced us to create something more substantial within a short amount of time. We were able to communicate better as a group, which proved to be effective for the piece as a whole. In the end there were specific dramaturgical tactics that were brought up in the script in order to show our own personal connections to lust, gluttony, and greed - which is what the play was supposed to be about in the first place. Somewhere in the middle of the rehearsal process this idea was lost and the email actually forced us to come back to this. At first, I was disappointed that members of my group had sent this email, but fortunately it prompted us to create a better piece.

Chapter 4: The Final Product

In the beginning of our final piece we decided to mention the email as we thought it would be a funny reconciliation joke that symbolized our process. While writing the script we came up with the idea of having novice nuns and a head nun that was played by Salome. For the most part the characters were created and chosen quite randomly. We each played characters that were far different from who we actually are, which was important to me. I did not only want the piece to be challenging for the audience, but I wanted to challenge myself as a performer which is why I decided to take on the role of the alpha nun. While the alpha nun is still essentially a novice she knows more than the other nuns do. Our advisor suggested that the alpha nun should represent the devil. We decided to give this character the title of alpha nun based off the idea of sorority culture. Sororities were another female specific secular institution that we wanted to comment on. While the convent serves as the primary secular group within our show we wanted to see how we could expand the idea of secular institutions by creating more, which is why the “alpha nun” creates her own sorority. She does this by manipulating the other nuns into thinking that they are going to gain a better life from her teachings, just as they had previously felt they would gain within the convent.

In the end our show become less about nuns and more about women in a secularized space. The convent served as a specific setting for our audience, but we did not comment much on religion at all. The play opens with the idea of routine, which is the only relation to an actual convent that is depicted within our piece. Once the “alpha nun” walks into the convent all the normal rules and regulations of the space are completely shattered as she terminates the other nun’s routine. The space shifts the

second she picks up the gossip magazine. We wanted to display the “alpha nun” reading a gossip magazine because we all agreed that this gesture was a great segway into our representation lust, gluttony, and greed. A gossip magazine is pleasurable to look at, but the idea of these magazines is invasive and morally unjust. While many people know that gossip magazine are low forms of pleasure they still look at them anyways and continue to want to see more; the gossip magazine resembles ideas of guilt and unnecessary pleasure.

The next pivotal moment of the show is when the “alpha nun” blames the head nun for sending an email. We used the email as the reason for why we were all in this convent. The email symbolized our own sins and this was our punishment. Like I said before “the email incident” turned out to be more beneficial to our process than harmful. The next beat of the show is where the “alpha nun” gets two of the novice nuns to commit their first sin, which is “drinking the blood of the lord;” also known as wine. We got this idea from the part in the reality show where the nuns all secretly gathered to get drunk. Next, the nuns are given excessive amounts of food - which is essentially where greed and gluttony come into play. We wanted show literally symbolize these words while also creating a storyline that ties them all together. Salome’s character, the “head nun,” was there to remind the audience and us that the other nuns were breaking the rules of the convent.

One of the best moments within this play is when the “alpha nun” asks the other nuns if they have been fulfilled from their time in the convent. Each of us, personally, did not understand how one could lead a fulfilling life being trapped in their devotion to God. This is where we expressed our own views on religion and secularism. Each of the nuns

says that they were expecting to be fulfilled, but they were not. There was something missing from their lives, which is why they joined the convent in the first place, but still have not found a way to fill the hole. The alpha nun convinces them that she will fill it up for them.

In the next part of the show we discuss the idea of perfection and fulfillment of the self. As a group we believed that perfection was a gluttonous desire, one that is unnecessary to obtain. The scene between the alpha nun and the head nun displays this. It becomes clear that each of these nuns have selfish reasons for joining the convent. When Salome's character says "I'm doing this for the greater good, I'm doing this for me," she proves how selfish human desire can be. While the alpha nun manipulates and tells everyone to start doing things they enjoy she is also doing this for her own benefit. She is the most selfish out of all the characters, as she convinces the other nuns to be part of a cult in which she is the lead of.

Lastly, we wanted to incorporate modern day issues that embodied lust, gluttony into our piece as well. We wanted to display common issues that the audience could relate to outside of the world in our convent. When the alpha nun asks the other nuns to "update themselves" she alludes to the power of technology, which we saw as a global desire that embodies each of these sins. We live in a world where everyone wants to have the newest technology, the best version of a product, and wants more of it than they need. They rely on these tools to function when in reality people have lived a long time without these gadgets and did just fine. We wanted to address mass consumerism and our relationship to technology. Each of these ideas was expressed during the update. The alpha nun says that the other nuns will become the "best version of themselves," which is

something that everyone strives for in our modern day world. As a group, we strongly believed that besides owning nice items and the latest gadgets that another sin within our world is the way in which people create false visions of themselves via social media and other public platforms. We wanted to express how technology and consumerism are controlling our lives. Within our piece, the alpha nun attempts to control the nuns in the same way that technology controls everyday humans.

Finally the karaoke scene in our show was not included in the piece until the very last week of our rehearsal process. In the end, we felt that completing the piece with an update was not enough. We wanted to show that while these nuns were breaking free of the convent, they were still being forced into an all girl secular community where they would be trapped within the same cycle of adhering to a higher power. When Eleanor's character says, "I cannot generate anymore," this means that she is exhausted from fulfilling the expectations of others and of a secular community. However, she is still trapped in "hell," which is now the world that the alpha nun created and she cannot get out of it, as are the rest of the nuns. Therefore, "Girls Just Wanna Have Fun" seemed like an appropriate ending. The song says one thing while our characters body language and emotions say another. They sing about wanting to have fun, while on stage they are struggling to make sounds and let loose. This final scene shows that these girls never escaped hell. They are still under the control of someone and are not satisfied.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The road to creating my senior project was definitely challenging to say the least. In a way I think we almost had too much time to construct a twenty-five minute piece of theater. Through this process I learned that I am more comfortable when writing a play to be performed rather than purely devising it. However, this process forced me to explore both methods and I feel as if I have become a better theater maker because of it. Despite the many setbacks that were forced upon this project I think we created a successful piece. Overall, our inspiration was drawn from various sources of material - most of them not including pieces of theater. We read books, watched television shows, and drew from our personal experiences rather than other performances. The decision to create a collective piece based off *Dante's Inferno* was unexpected as I was not there when it was decided, but it pushed me to create something that I never would have thought of making before. This prompt helped narrow in our ideas and led us create an enjoyable and thought provoking piece of theater that I can confidently say I am proud of.

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LUST GLUTTONY GREED

A senior project submitted to the Division of the Arts at Bard College
Presented as a part of the INFERNO Festival

Created in collaboration by

Abigail Adler '16

Salome Dewell '16

Leah Rabinowitz '16

Eleanor Robb '16

Jack Ferver, Advisor

Characters

ABBY/ GAMMA played by Abigail Adler

ELEANOR/ BETA played by Eleanor Robb

LEAH /ALPHA played by Leah Rabinowitz

SALOME/ THETA played by Salome Dewell

Fluorescent lights come up. Three nuns (SALOME, ELEANOR, ABBY) are sitting in metal chairs on stage. They begin their work. SALOME goes to back to polish silver, ELEANOR goes to sew/mend, ABBY peels potatoes. The fourth chair is empty. LEAH enters, holding her habit in her hand. She is unseen by the others. She sits, dons the habit, surveys the nuns. LEAH pushes her whole stack of BIBLES over. She pulls out a star magazine, begins reading. The sound of the bibles tipping over alerts the others, and they treat her as if she's been there the whole time.

SALOME

It would be sooooo nice if we could all devote our minds and bodies to the tasks at hand.

LEAH takes no notice. ABBY and ELEANOR look over, interested.

SALOME continued

The tasks at hand.

LEAH still does nothing. ABBY and ELEANOR look at each other, trying to figure out what to do.

SALOME

Put that thing down and sort, Sister. Or do you want extra time in the basement.

Beat. SALOME/ELEANOR/ABBY resume work. L picks up magazine again. ELEANOR and ABBY notice and are astonished and impressed by her brazenness. They look over at SALOME, who is hard at work. ELEANOR/ABBY sneak over to LEAH.

ABBY

Where did you find that?

LEAH

Around.

ELEANOR

Around where?

LEAH

I have my ways.

LEAH/ELEANOR/ABBY crowd around the magazine. ELEANOR gasps at something in the magazine, followed by giggles from LEAH/ABBY. SALOME looks up.

SALOME

What did I just say?

LEAH

Relax, I'm just taking a break.

SALOME

I swear to God in Heaven. When you are punished, you will do the work you are assigned, *without* breaks.

LEAH

Do you think you have that much authority to tell me what to do? Please. You don't even know how to send a confidential email.

SALOME

What?

LEAH

If someone just knew how the "reply all" function worked, and I hadn't read it, none of us would be here.

SALOME

All I ask is that we just do what we've been told so we can finish and continue our worship, which I'm sure, is in everyone's best interest.

ELEANOR

It was a little unfair of you to send that email from the library computer; after all we were working just as hard as you...

SALOME

Really? I can't believe you're still talking about that it happened, it was a mistake, get over-

ABBY

Stop! Stop it. Please.

There is a beat.

LEAH

You ladies can finish this magazine, I've got plenty more. I'm thirsty.

ABBY

There's a water pitcher in the corner....

LEAH

Like it's obvious- I'm thirsty. I'm getting something to drink.

ELEANOR

What is there to even drink down here?

LEAH

Let's play a game. Ladies, what do we drink on Sundays?

ABBY

Water.

ELEANOR

Ooh! Another glass of milk at dinner?

LEAH

NO. (*It's so obvious*)... At communion....

ABBY

Oh, the blood of the Lord!

ELEANOR

Oh right, yeah! Wine!

LEAH

Exactly.

ELEANOR

So what? We literally drink that every Sunday.

LEAH

Yeah, one mouthful. You gotta drink a little more for the real fun.

ELEANOR

But, like, *how*?

LEAH

(*Story telling esque*) Have you ever wondered where all the sacraments were kept when they weren't being used for church?

ABBY

I've never really thought about it.

LEAH

What if I told you that there was more than working—more fulfillments, more gratitude, and better sisterhood some other way?

ABBY

What does that have to do with communion?

ELEANOR

What do you mean?

LEAH

Open the cabinet.

ABBY

How? We can't do that-- we don't have the key.

LEAH

Don't worry sisters; I'll make sure you can do anything you want.

LEAH pulls a bobby pin from under her habit and gives it to ELEANOR and ABBY. They are mesmerized. They move in, ABBY takes the bobby pin with great care and brings it UPSTAGE CENTER with ELEANOR. ABBY begins to pick the lock.

ABBY

Are you sure this is supposed to work?

LEAH

Turn clockwise.

ELEANOR

How do you know that?

LEAH

I've had experience

ABBY fails. ELEANOR takes the pin. She succeeds. They pause. And turn to look at LEAH.

LEAH

Satisfaction awaits.

SALOME

What are you talking about? Who do you think you are?!

LEAH

You'll see.

ABBY and ELEANOR open the CABINET. Pandora's box moment. It's filled with some sort of mash up between a sorority closet and a dusty church cabinet. LEAH has decked it out with stolen tea lights, lots of wine and crackers, and outfits, pulled together from the church-run consignment shop/her own ingenuity. She has prepped for this moment for years. LEAH sidles up and pulls out two bottles, and four glasses.

ABBY gasps with delight as LEAH pours her and ELEANOR two huge glasses. She crosses to SALOME and leaves a glass at her feet. Moves CENTER.

LEAH

A toast. To a new sisterhood.

ELEANOR and ABBY move to flank LEAH. They cheers. SALOME looks on in horror. She starts to pray. SALOME has her eyes closed and prays more fervently throughout this. LEAH, ELEANOR, ABBY finish their wine.

LEAH

I'm hungry.

ABBY

Is there something to eat in the cabinet?

LEAH

Come sit with me. I'd love to share.

They move their chairs to form gossip corner diagonal from SALOME. LEAH goes back UPSTAGE CENTER to CABINET. ABBY and ELEANOR sit, excitedly waiting to see what comes next. SALOME is consumed with pious action- perhaps picking up discarded work, reading the bible, etc. LEAH brings a box of communion crackers.

LEAH

Here, eat some of these

ELEANOR

I can't believe we're eating these.

ABBY

I've never had more than one at a time! *Whispers* They're not that good when you eat more than one I think...

ELEANOR

Yeah, they're a little dry...

LEAH

Oh, do you want something else?

ABBY

Do you have something else?

ELEANOR

We wouldn't want to impose...

LEAH

No, not at all! Please, I want you to have satisfaction.

She gets up, goes to the CABINET. LEAH opens a drawer in the CABINET and pulls out a serving tray of assorted chocolate candies and grapes. She carries it to the cluster of chairs

LEAH

Abby.... how do you feel about peeling potatoes all day?

ABBY

Well, I guess this isn't the worst punishment I ever received here. *Lowers voice so that Sister SALOME cannot hear* One time, I once filled my bed with spare robes so I could sneak out of my room to smoke, but one day I forgot, and that's how she found me, smoking Marlboros in the bathroom at 3 in the morning. I was on toilet duty for months after that.

LEAH

Oh no!

ABBY

It's better than when we had to shovel the sidewalk after that huge snowstorm because we talked during Monday night services, and we didn't have anything covering our faces

LEAH

That seems like overreacting.... Eleanor, this isn't your first time being punished right?

.

ELEANOR

No! Remember that time when I slept through the trip to the shrine and had to wake up for the next week two hours before everyone else and scrub the floors? My fingers were so dry and red, and so painful!

They all laugh, raucously.

LEAH

How excessive.

ABBY

Right?

ELEANOR

That's what we're saying! One time, we tried to argue a punishment for being late to dinner and then we got doubly punished.

ABBY

Or that time....

She stops- Upset.

LEAH

Abby, you can tell me anything. I'm here for you.

ABBY

That time when I got my knuckles struck with a ruler for...

It's quiet for a second. ABBY shakes her head, not going to continue. ELEANOR picks up.

ELEANOR

I guess we always seem to be getting in trouble...

ELEANOR

This is probably the best punishment we've ever had.

LEAH

You both deserve it.

ABBY

Thanks for listening to us... no one here really does.

LEAH

It was my pleasure.

ELEANOR

Hey what else was in that cabinet? Do you really mean when you say.... fulfillment?

LEAH

Oh, has being a novice not provided contentment for you?

ELEANOR

Well, not exactly... Joining the convent I thought I was getting the best of both worlds- sisterhood and serenity. But with all this work and all these punishments, I feel like I've lost sight of who I am... And I'm scared that... this isn't my true path.

LEAH

Her plan might work

Our lives can seem as if there is no direction or -

SALOME

Addressing Eleanor

You don't mean that, you cannot mean that.

ELEANOR

I think I do, I've never really been able to say it in words before, especially surrounded by all these sisters all the time. I feel like I'm trapped, that someone tipped an empty glass over me, so even if I screamed... no one would hear me.

ABBY

Anytime we expressed ourselves, it seemed like we were punished. We're constantly hidden. We sit and read in the parlor and the public views us from behind a gate. Literally.

ELEANOR

We are the amorphous voices filling the church every Sunday. And for what?

ABBY

Forgive me for thinking this can't be it.

SALOME

Think of the beauty. You are good and virtuous and pure.

ABBY

Our routines repeat an endless cycle-

SALOME

Your entire life is an endless cycle; it's all endless cycles- that is how life is. Heaven will free you from that. Just listen, just open your mind, He is speaking so clearly-

LEAH

Have you ever heard Him?

SALOME

How can you ask me that? Every night I pray, every waking moment I hear His voice ringing in my ears-

LEAH

What does He say to you?

SALOME

Everything. He reminds me of everything that I can be for Him, of all of the ways that I can do more, be more.

LEAH

So you're never enough.

SALOME

Of course not. If any of us were ever enough there would be no reason to live. I have always known I was meant for this. I have known ever since I was a child that when I became a nun, I would be the most devout, the most beautiful. I would strive for perfection. I can always improve, always do better. There is always more for me to reach for and to find.

LEAH

You'll always be empty. You will always be starving for more. Always hungry.

SALOME

This is the life I chose. This is the only life. This is the life I chose. I can always be better, I can always do more-

LEAH

You have no control, you have no meaning, you will never have satisfaction when you give away your power.

SALOME

I....

LEAH

You are powerless, why do you do this to yourself? Why do you think this is ok? This hierarchy that you subscribed to is holding you back, keeping you from the perfection you seek. It makes you dependent. It makes you pathetic.

SALOME

I am doing my duties, I work so hard, and I'm doing this for the greater good, I'm doing this for me.

LEAH

No you're not, you're just a cog in the large machine and you will never benefit from that.

Why don't you believe me?

SALOME

Because I'm terrified! I just want to mean something

LEAH

I was once like you. I thought those same things. I thought I was worthless, this place made me feel worthless. But I have found the way to make all of those feelings evaporate. You can be someone. You can be complete. You can be so much better. You mean something to me.

(LEAH claps again. ELEANOR and ABBY sit up. SALOME stands up from her chair. LEAH takes SALOME's chair, pulls it upstage, and stands on it to deliver her sermon)

You're being asked to constantly produce. Create for the greater good placed well above your station. In this damp basement you toil, and for what? Some salvation that will be given to you once you die? But I've figured something out. I've heard it in the buzz of these lights, the undeniable current of energy that runs throughout our world. Who says we can't be in charge of our own production? I say we produce ourselves. Make us the most fulfilled, curious, most innovative, happiest people in the world. We can indulge in our pleasure, eschewing these stifling robes and confines for a higher calling. Our basement becomes our kingdom, and we will thrive. Trust me.

SALOME

I trust you.

ELEANOR looks around, raises her hand awkwardly, puts it down, fiddles with her robes

ELEANOR

How will we "thrive" in this musty basement?

LEAH

I have prepared everything to give you the tools you need to emerge, a beautiful, rewarded, devout BETA.

ELEANOR

A BETA?

LEAH

YES, part of this emergence is through creating a new self. Your new self is the best version- the prime model, the most up to date. I have that power.

ABBY

What would I be??

LEAH

You would become the supreme version of you- free of guilt and punishment, a GAMMA.

ABBY

Wow... A GAMMA

SALOME

Softly... And what would I be?

LEAH

With some consideration... A THETA.

SALOME

What does that mean?

LEAH

You'll be the best you. No more doubt. No more fears. A THETA. Confident and strong.

ELEANOR

And what will you be?

LEAH

I *am* the ALPHA

LEAH goes to the closet and brings out a small bag

LEAH

Now, do you pledge to follow my teachings and view me as your ALPHA?

SALOME/ELEANOR/LEAH

Yes.

From now on, they speak into the microphones.

ALPHA

Good. Let's begin.

She Claps again. BETA/GAMMA/THETA take their places for affirmation

Each of you please read one of your new life-affirming positive messages to live by.

BETA

Make updating a habit. Any moment you doubt yourself, you are a lesser version. Don't hesitate-innovate.

GAMMA

Your five senses are the only things that are real. Thrive in the beauty of truth, excellence, and tech.

THETA

ALPHA is the ultimate update. Strive to be like her, but remember that ALPHA created you.

ALL

WE'VE BEEN BEGUILED BY THE IDEA THAT ANYONE ELSE IS IN CHARGE OF OUR PRODUCTION. WE'VE BEEN SUBMERGED BY FRUITLESS PIETY. WE RENOUNCE OUR PAST SELVES TO BECOME OUR BEST SELVES. WE WERE POWERLESS AND THE ONLY WAY TO REGAIN CONTROL IS TO LISTEN TO OUR ALPHA.

BETA

"There is a pain that hurts and a pain that changes you" Expel the pain that hurts.

GAMMA

There is an update that controls and an update that changes you. Expel the update that controls.

THETA

There is a god outside and a god inside of you. Expel the god outside of you.

ALL

WE ARE REPROGRAMING OUR SYSTEMS. WE HAVE BEEN LIVING OUR BEST SELVES FOR OTHERS. WE ARE RECLAIMING SELFISHNESS. WE ARE REINVENTING SISTERHOOD. WE ARE REDUCING OUR DEPENDENCY ON OTHERS AND NATURAL GAS. WE WILL BE HYBRIDS OF NEW TECHNOLOGY.

BETA GAMMA THETA move towards each other, they are together at last.

BETA

I thought I would be saved by the church, but now I've found salvation.

GAMMA

I thought I would be fulfilled by the church, but now I've been fulfilled.

THETA

I thought I would be nothing without the church, but now I'm somebody.

ALL

I DON'T WANT TO BE THE OLD ME, I WANT TO BE THE BEST VERSION OF ME. I AM MYSELF 2.0. I

AM INVINCIBLE IN MY NEW DESIGN. I AM SUPREME. TOGETHER WE ARE BEAUTIFUL.

TOGETHER WE ARE CELESTIAL. TOGETHER WE ARE INFINITY

They scream as Alpha raises her arms, reveling in the chaos.

ALPHA

Now sign that you agree to the terms and conditions.

GAMMA

But it's so long!

BETA

Just sign it!!!!

They sign on the dotted line. All three turn and walk upstage to ALPHA, anxiously awaiting her blessings.

ALPHA

Bless you, my LETTERS.

ALPHA blows glitter on her new followers. They turn to face the audience, reveling in their new sisterhood.

ALPHA

Let's begin the first update.

BETA/GAMMA/THETA hold hands and march upstage, giggling. This is their Miss America moment. They have earned it.

Before the update can begin, there are three loud footsteps that emanate from above.

BETA/GAMMA/THETA freeze, and look up.

THETA

How would we ever go back up there?

BETA

Why would we ever go back up there?

ALPHA

We will never go back up there. They aren't ALPHAS, BETAS, GAMMAS or THETAS. They are not as shiny as us. Our glows will not be diminished. We will pray to ourselves, rejoicing in my creation of you. The communion is now our body and our blood. This basement is our heaven, real and here. We are saved.

We can be godly together.

ALPHA prepares for the first update. They freeze.

A blue screen with karaoke countdown bars appears. It counts down from eight to one. Nothing happens. It counts down again. Nothing happens.

ELEANOR

I don't think I can generate anymore.

LEAH

Well, you have to.

LEAH claps. The four of them strike a pose, smiles wide and empty eyes.

The karaoke screen finally work and the lyrics to "Girls Just Want To Have Fun" are displayed.

They sing.

Blackout.